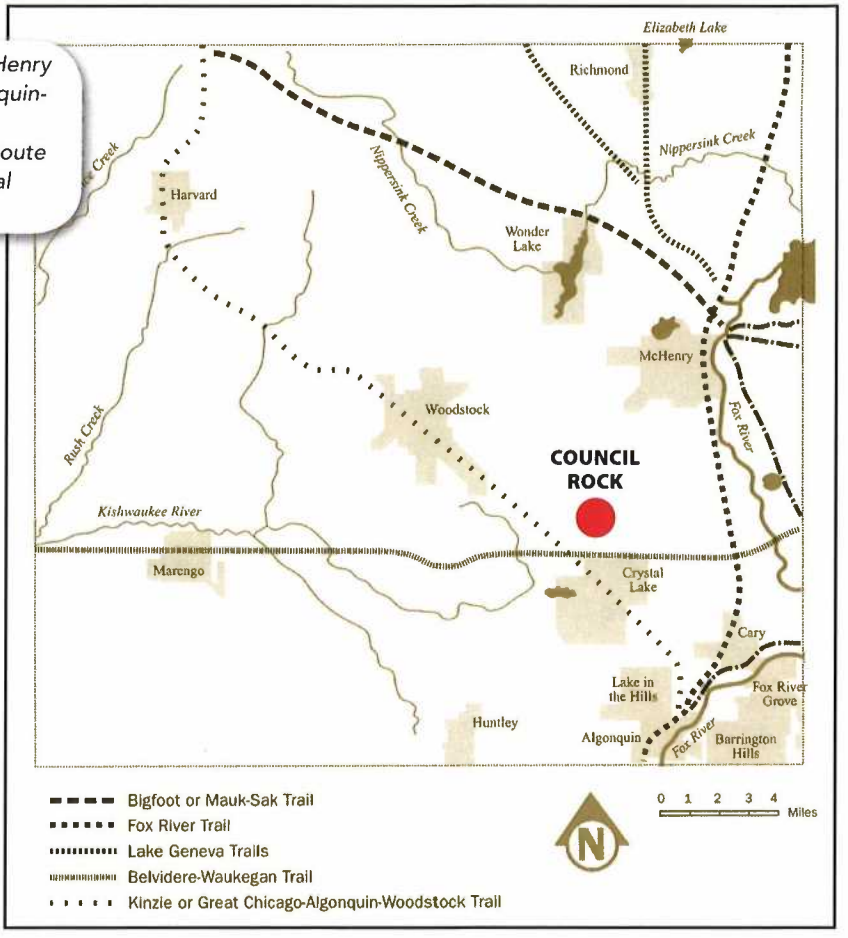
Tracer

The McHenry County Historical Society's Quarterly Magazine

ENJOYED BY OUR MEMBERS FOR 57 YEARS | 2020 - VOLUME 1



Map shows major Native American trails through McHenry County. The pertinent area the Great Chicago-Algonquin-Woodstock Trail which would become Route 14 (the Northwest Highway), the Belvidere-Waukegan Trail (Route 176) and the Fox River Trail (east of Route 31). General location of Council Rock has been added in red.

The Quest for Council Rock

** Editor's Note: This is the second, in a two-part series beginning with the winter issue.*

A few years ago, Kurt Pearson was researching Swedenberg, the Swedish community in Crystal Lake, and stumbled upon an April 10, 1969, article in the *Crystal Lake Herald* titled, "Indians Gathered at Council Rock by Light of the New Moon". The newspaper story gave an account of then Nunda Township supervisor Harold Freese taking a *Herald* news reporter on an adventure into "a dense wood north of Crystal Lake" to show him the location of the huge rock, where Native American chiefs once gathered monthly. The article ended: "Certainly the story of Council Rock is one that should be saved for posterity." Pearson and trusted friend, Jim Popovich, made it their mission to find this missing rock.

By KURT PEARSON with JAMES POPOVICH

The possibility that the storied Council Rock was no longer accessible was rather disappointing. But there was still hope.

A rough timeline of the Covered Bridge subdivision could alleviate our concerns.

Already in the fall of 1968 Essex-Costello Real Estate was selling lots in the subdivision with the following description: "Drive across the covered bridge and enter a world of gently rolling hills, accented by majestic oak, stately hickory trees and spring-fed lakes."

If Essex-Costello was expecting people to drive through to pick out a lot for their new home, at least rudimentary roads would have had to be in place. The rock, if it was going to be buried, already would have been buried – long before a news reporter, escorted by former Nunda Township Supervisor Harold Freese, snapped a picture of it in spring 1969.

Two days later after Jim Popovich's conversation with carpenter Todd Tonyan, I received a phone call from Jim Heisler who had read the article I had sent him. He knew the area, his mom's old stomping ground, and knew of a few people who lived on the north side of West Hillside Road who might be able to help. He was on the trail and promised we would hear from him soon.

It seemed that wherever we went, be it the Crystal Lake Public Library or the McHenry County Historical Society, the people we spoke with became interested in Council Rock.

"Let me know if you find it," they all said.

A few days later we received another email from Harold's son, Phil Freese, promising additional details about the rock's location in Covered Bridge Trails. I sent him my address. The packet of stories and additional information on Council Rock could not get here fast enough!

We again scheduled research time with librarian Arlyn

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The Tracer is a quarterly publication carrying local history topics, news and information for members of the McHenry County Historical Society.

Our museum is located between Routes 20 and 176, at 6422 Main Street in Union, Illinois

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Because of the pandemic by appointment only. See website for details.

McHenry County Historical Society members enjoy FREE admission.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history.

(An Illinois Not-for-profit 501c3 Corporation)

We Appreciate Our Members!

President's

Column

A year of anniversaries worth recalling, a virus to forget

This year marks two important anniversaries. One is the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which is often incorrectly credited for giving women voting rights. In fact, before women "got the right to vote," they lost the right to vote, and partly regained and re-lost the right for approximately 150 years. Illinois, for example, passed a law in 1891 allowing women to vote for school officers.

History is seldom that simple. History is complicated, just like our lives today.

Women's suffrage remains a politically charged topic, which probably explains the vast amount of programming and attention that the Society has paid to it. Our Members Meeting last year featured a talk on suffrage, as did one of our sampler series this year. Exhibits Curator Kira Stell has readied a new museum exhibit, "Votes for Women: The Fight for Illinois Suffrage." It profiles some of the prominent local people, organizations and artifacts which were a part of the fight for women's rights. (Visit GotHistory.org for details on MCHS' reopening plans and new guidelines for visitors.)

Recently, I attended a historical reenactment of the night Gen. Ulysses Grant was elected president. Deciding to have some fun, and with a perfectly straight face, I began engaging the reenactors on the issue of women's suffrage – using the arguments of that era *against* women voting. I could tell from the stricken look on the gentlemen's faces and the way they kept darting sideways looks at each other, that they didn't know whether I was pulling their legs or if I was criminally insane.

The docent became so angry that she almost threw me out of the museum. Meanwhile, my husband - who knows my idea of a practical joke - was doubled up laughing.

The 19th Amendment, which gave women the vote, passed the U.S. House in 1918. Two weeks later the Senate followed suit. When Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the amendment on Aug. 18, 1920, securing the necessary three quarter majority it became law. Illinois has the distinction of being the first state east of the Mississippi River to do so, which is why 2020 is the 100th anniversary of that date.

This year also marks the 400th anniversary the Mayflower Compact. Without the compact there would have been no United States, and no McHenry County. The people and ideas of the Mayflower have indelibly changed our county. Nancy Wagner, wife of our late board president, Bob Wagner, U.S. Grant, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Zachary Taylor are just a few of the Mayflower descendants who have made their mark on McHenry County. The journal of William Bradford, governor of the Plymouth Colony, is interesting reading. He recounts how they first tried to form a socialist utopia, an idea that almost killed off the entire settlement.

The small group quickly adopted a capitalist economy, and the lessons those few handfuls of people learned has shaped how our nation was formed and how we live today. This year, despite the coronavirus, murder hornets and riots, I am thankful to celebrate these two important anniversaries – and the benefits we enjoy today because of them.

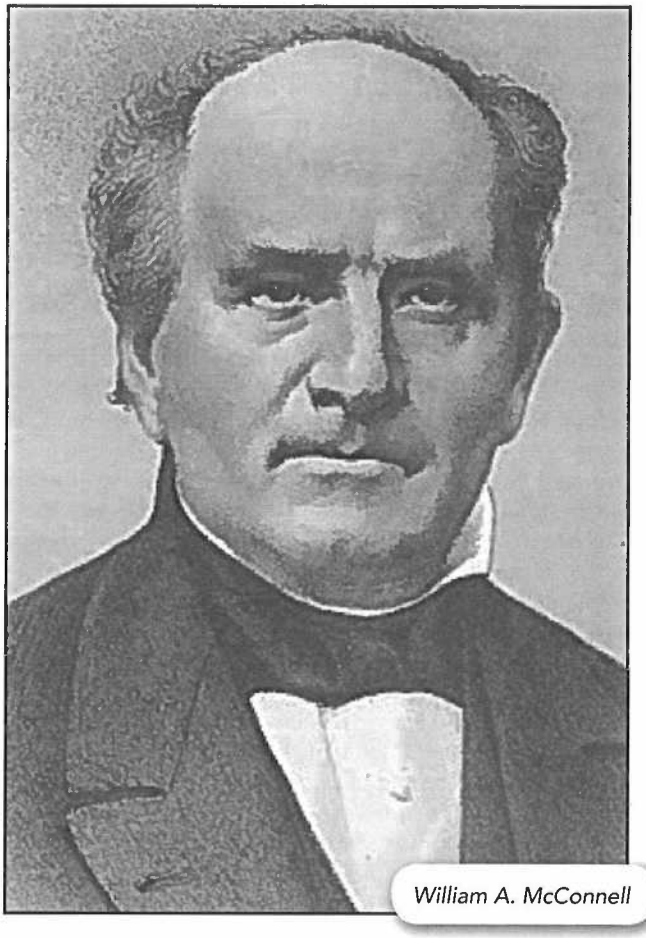
~ Gratefully yours,
Paula Rieghns

"In 1836 William Alexander McConnell, age 27, left his home in Muncy, Pennsylvania, to seek his fortunes in the newly opened Northwest Territory outside Chicago. ... Journey with McConnell as he travels the newly opened lands in Illinois near the Wisconsin border, builds a log cabin, returns to Pennsylvania for his bride, and with his newly arriving neighbors, begins to tame the wilderness to create Montelona Farm"

- Rommy Lopat & Michelle Bray Wilson

McConnell was a pioneer who tamed, transformed county

By KURT BEGALKA



William A. McConnell

Montelona Farm – The Story of Pioneer William A. McConnell's Homestead in Richmond, Illinois is a new book which is less about what must have been a rigorous journey of more than 700 miles from Pennsylvania and more about the destination. Indeed, William McConnell had a hand in virtually all of the civic pillars critical to the future success of Richmond and McHenry County.

Perhaps McConnell followed [Native American] trails radiating northwest out of Chicago," authors Rommy Lopat and Michelle Wilson write. "One trail approximated today's Route 14 running toward the Virginia Settlement (Ridgefield). Another, which in time would become today's U.S. Route 20, connected Chicago to the lead mines around Galena in the state's far northwest. Yet another trail headed out toward Fox Lake, and then veered north along the Fox River. Parts of this trail would one day become Route 12. Another went from Little Fort [Waukegan] west along Route 120."

Which one would McConnell have chosen?

"There were so many unanswered questions when we started our research into the early 1800s," Wilson said. "Where were the Indian encampments and how long were they there? Why were Methodists inherent to particular areas? Why were townships created in 1848? ... When you pull on one historic thread you easily loosen another."

The 200-plus page book required a significant amount of detective work. But in many cases, all time left us are best guesses. For example, the published histories of McHenry County give different dates for McConnell's initial arrival in McHenry County, and these do not agree with McConnell family lore.

"Eventually we were able to date his arrival to the summer of 1837 from the U.S. Survey Maps which showed two cabins in place. From that, it fell into place that McConnell left Pennsylvania in September 1836, perhaps on the 10th, over-wintered at his brother's cabin in Jackson, Michigan, and arrived in what would become Richmond Township in May of 1837 – probably on the 15th," Lopat said.

After erecting his cabin to stake his claim, McConnell returned to Muncy, Pa. and married a childhood friend, Elizabeth Bodine, a woman of Quaker and Huguenot ancestry. They married on Jan. 18, 1838, and returned that spring to Illinois. They welcomed the first of three sons into the world on Feb. 3, 1839. They name him after Elizabeth's father, Abraham Bodine. Strangely, however, the histories bestow the honor of first white child born in Richmond Township to the McConnell's second son, John McConnell, born on July 8, 1842.

This leaves another mystery. Where was the eldest child, Abram Bodine McConnell born that first winter following the couple's arrival in Illinois?

The historical record is an uneven, often unsubstantiated, quick claim on the past. We build it layer by layer, only to find out – often much later – there is a flaw in the foundation.

"We definitely felt the pressure to remain accurate," Wilson said. "We can't say for sure where Abram was born. The couple could have decamped that winter for a more populous place, perhaps McHenry where a midwife could help out."

Fellow settler Charles Noyes built a cabin just east of McConnell on a nearby bluff along the Nippersink Creek. He named the place Montelona – after his hometown in New

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Booth at the MCHS research library in Union. We perused pertinent surveyor's notebooks that Robert Frenz had been accessioning the last time we were there, but came up empty concerning Council Rock.

We revisited the aerial photographs and intensely studied the now limited area where we believed Council Rock was located. Jim was particularly interested in the 1961 photograph with the leafless trees. He compared these to other maps and determined the extent of oak trees noticing a distinctive line where the old oaks ended. We surmised that Council Rock had to be somewhere along this line to not only include the trees, but also view the ancient lake mentioned in the article - an area stretching all the way to Barreville. This area once was referred to as "Spring Valley" because of all the springs bursting forth from the surrounding hillsides *(McHenry County 1832-1968 793).*

Jim received more clues from Todd Tonyan, the only person either of us had personally met up to now who had actually seen Council Rock. Todd specifically remembered that, as a boy, he and his friends would leave Walkup Woods from Wild Cherry Road and walk almost straight across Hillside Road into the woods until arriving at the rock.

Returning to aerial photographs, Jim could see that such a path would lead almost directly to the intersection of New Hampshire and Vermont Trails in Covered Bridge. After our trip to Union, Jim's conversations with Todd and Jim's own close study of the oak tree lines, we believed the best potential area for Council Rock was on the north side of Vermont Trail and the east side of New Hampshire Trail.

We also finally made a trip to the McHenry County Conservation District in Glacial Park to see Gail Brown, the district's scientific database coordinator. She recommended we attend the upcoming Archaeological Awareness Day at the Power-Walker House and speak with archaeologist Sara Pfannkuche. Coincidentally she is the daughter of Craig Pfannkuche, one of our early contacts.

Lost History on the Doorstep

On Sept. 7 a package arrived from Kansas. Phil Freese shipped 50 pages of local history to my doorstep. It contained a variety of stories dealing with old Crystal Lake: the lake itself, the pickle works, Shramm's Greenhouse and the development of certain neighborhoods (real gems in their own right). But, of course, we were most interested at the time in Harold's memories in the section titled "Council Rock."

It began: "I knew about the large rock for about seven or eight years before I met John Rose. John Walkup, who lived in the beautiful old stone house across from Veterans' Acres parking lot, owned the woods named 'Covered Bridge' where the rock sits. We often hunted the woods for squirrels, rabbits and pheasants."

The most intriguing part of the two-page narrative, was in the last paragraph: "I told Mr. Woodman all about the rock and he told me later that he had put the rock at the corner of four lots." Mr. Woodman had to be Lorrin E. Woodman, one of the developers of Covered Bridge Trails. He apparently had been quite aware of this huge rock, and either drew lot lines accordingly or, less likely, had the immovable rock moved.

Looking at the original lot lines included in the Covered Bridge Trails brochure and considering Todd Tonyan's childhood memories, there appeared to be only one spot in our targeted area where four different properties converge.

We were ready to take a walk in the woods.

Lorrin E. Woodman, one of the developers of Covered Bridge Trails.

Into the Woods

Jim contacted Cesar and Eugenia Jiminez in the subdivision, who owned two of the four pieces of property we targeted. After Jim explained to him our quest for Council Rock, Cesar became quite interested and suggested getting together in a couple days to search the back of his lot. He strongly recommended that we wear boots as the ground can be quite soft and muddy. This boded well for our search as we knew there should be a natural spring or two near the rock, as well as a creek.

Two days later we met Cesar at his home. He greeted us enthusiastically, generously providing us both with garden gloves and walking sticks. He then led the way, carrying gardening loppers, toward the back of his property. Through thick underbrush and fallen trees we made our way past a winding creek or two. We found more than one natural spring. Thanks to Cesar, who had years ago marked the corner points of his property, we even found the suspected spot of Council Rock at the juncture of four lots – marked by a metal post and an old ragged orange flag.

A few yards to the north was an outcropping of stone with just a couple square feet of rock showing. Jim thought it could be limestone, which is what we were looking for. Had the eroding soil on the inclined terrain covered Council Rock over the past 50 years?

Jim went to his car to get a shovel and an old railroad tamping iron, and, upon returning, immediately started digging. Cesar clipped off some thick roots in the way and slowly more rock was exposed. Jim used the tamping iron to locate the rock edges and then used leverage to determine the rock's size.

Suddenly the rock moved. We all groaned in disappointment. This was no Council Rock.

Darkness had begun to set in and we decided to call it an evening. Cesar invited us to explore again on another day, if we liked. We hiked back to the street, thanked him for his hospitality and went home to brainstorm our next steps.

The following weekend we attended the Archaeology Awareness Day. Sara Pfannkuche suggested reviewing notes of the 1834 McHenry County survey in the library at the McHenry County Conservation District. These records often used significant landmarks in the surveying process and perhaps Council Rock had been referenced. We would be circling back there soon.

The Invisible Road

Jim knew Covered Bridge Trail developer Lorrin Woodman's son, Randy, lived in the subdivision and contacted him. Randy knew of the rock and said he had camped there as a Boy Scout before Covered Bridge Trails was developed. He initially thought the rock had been buried or destroyed

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during the subdivision development. Randy informed Jim that his father's company, Baxter and Woodman Inc., had done all the drainage planning for Covered Bridge Trails and at some point the records were given to the Nunda Township Road District.

Before our return to the Nunda Township offices, Randy Woodman called back to say he had spoken with some of his former fellow Scouts who still lived in the area and there was a consensus that the rock was located near Pilcher Park – the neighborhood park on Connecticut Trail. He further described Council Rock as "quite large, about 8 feet across."

"If you were looking for it, you could not miss it," he said.

Hmmm. What did that say about us? We had been looking for it and missing it!

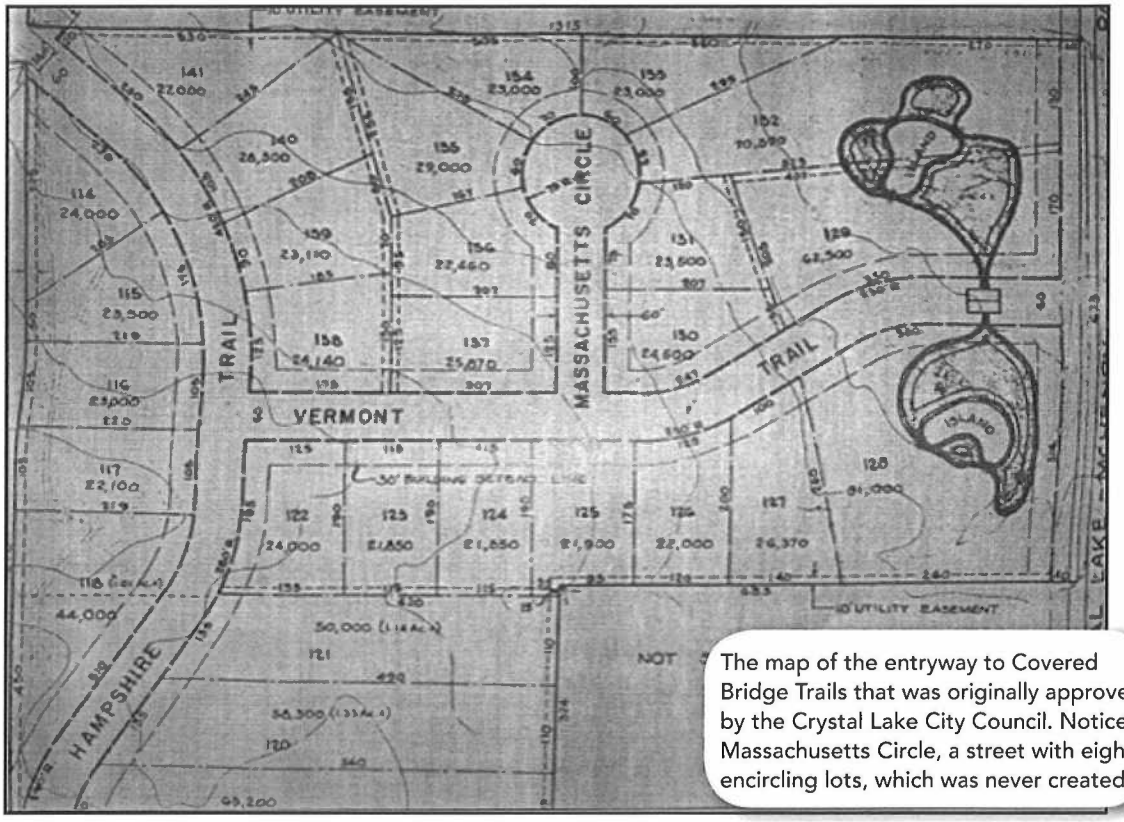
We went in search of Baxter and Woodman records filed at Nunda Township. At the office, we were shown three large file folders and several early maps. Two of the maps were of particular interest. One showed a gravel road in the general area of where we thought the rock was located (the 1969 *Crystal Lake Herald* article referenced a gravel road leading to the woods). Another map showed the original approved plan for the streets and lots of Covered Bridge Trails. What was so interesting about the second map was that it contained a planned street that was never put in. This invisible road – Massachusetts Circle – changed the subsequent lots in that area.

If Council Rock was placed "at the corner of four lots," as Mr. Woodman told Harold Freese, was that the originally planned lots or the subsequent lot lines after it was decided to nix Massachusetts Circle?

Sometimes it seemed like we were going in circles ourselves, chasing our own tails as we chased after this elusive rock.

The following day we drove to Glacial Park to check out the 1834 land survey notes, on Sara Pfannkuche's recommendation. Gail Brown already had the correct files ready and had made copies of pertinent information. Unfortunately, the survey notes tended to deal with the borders of the township sections. Our primary areas of interest were not along the borders.

We did, however, peruse several high-resolution aerial maps of the area which detailed the topography and showed the tree lines that might help us match up certain areas with the descriptions given in the newspaper article.



The map of the entryway to Covered Bridge Trails that was originally approved by the Crystal Lake City Council. Notice Massachusetts Circle, a street with eight encircling lots, which was never created.

"I Think I've Found Your Rock"

Around this time, we contacted E. J. Varga at the McHenry County Division of Transportation office in Hartland, a person recommended to us for his knowledge and interest in history by MCHS Administrator Kurt Begalka. We told Ernest about our quest and sent him a copy of the original article. He asked for a couple weeks to see what he could find, but it was only three days later that he called and said that he thought he found Council Rock. He recommended that we meet and invite Kurt Begalka, as well.

Before we could meet, we investigated two additional leads in Covered Bridge Trails, properties on the south side of Vermont Trail with the characteristics necessary to be prime candidates for the site of Council Rock. Cheryl and Randy Erd invited us to explore their back woods. We found a few good-sized rocks on the property but nothing approaching the alleged size of Council Rock.

The other lead was Bill Wingate's old property off Walkup Road. On a high-resolution aerial map from 2018, we noticed a suspicious formation we believed could be a big rock. Jim found multiple old newspaper articles about the current owners – Randy and Nancy Schietzelt – and the property, which included a conservation easement. The articles enhanced our enthusiasm for and interest in their land as a potential site for Council Rock. We wrote them and hoped for the best.

Our next piece of business was our highly-anticipated meeting with Ernest Varga. Jim and I, along with Kurt Begalka, met him in a conference room at the MCDOT headquarters. Mr. Varga expertly described his research and conclusions about Council Rock during the hour-plus meeting, using aerial photos and plat maps to make his case that the rock we were looking for had been moved - perhaps more than once - but now lay in Wingate Prairie in Veteran Acres.

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With pictures and documents, E. J. Varga (left) discusses with Kurt Begalka (center) and Jim Popovich (right) where Council Rock might be and what may have happened to it. Photo by K. Pearson.

Jim, who was familiar with this rock, particularly from a tour of Wingate Prairie provided by Bill Wingate in 1994, was a little skeptical that the rock was large enough and similar in shape to the Council Rock described in the 1969 article. E. J. recommended that we visit the Crystal Lake Park District offices to inquire about records they might have about the rock's move to Wingate Prairie.

That same day we visited both the rock and the park district offices, where helpful receptionist Margaret Foglesong connected us with John Fiorina, CLPD's Manager of Natural Resources. He might be able to give us more information on the Wingate Prairie rock.

Next, we visited the rock itself. We had heard from one individual that this rock was painted blue while another person told us the rock was painted red. But when we arrived in Wingate Prairie we were greeted by a large green beaver face painted on one end of the rock and layers of worn paint decorating its body. Looking past the color of its skin to its characteristics, we thought the rock was neither large enough nor the right composition. We also thought the difficulty of moving a rock to this site would hardly be worth the effort. A few days later John Fiorina confirmed the Wingate Prairie rock was not made of limestone.

Still no Council Rock, but we were not back to square one. Everyone we met on this quest had provided guidance along the way: expanding our vision, narrowing our search, answering our questions or questioning our answers. An encouraging email from Jim Heisler not only informed us that he knew two people with information about the rock, but urged us "don't give up!"

An Email Clarifies and Redirects

We thought that if Council Rock was on or near Bill Wingate's property, he might have written something about it. Mr. Fiorina told us that the park district had three or four cartons of Wingate's papers at its Shamrock Hills facility on Hillside Road. We arranged to review the materials a few days later, but the evening before we received an email that made that appointment virtually irrelevant. On Oct. 6, 2019, we receive a detailed and thoughtful response from the Schietzelts. It began:

"Thank you for sharing the article and your interest. We do not believe your rock is on our property for a couple of reasons..."

Bill Wingate, naturalist, conservationist and teacher.

Their points were hard to dispute. It stated that they had no limestone rocks fitting the description. Also, had it been on their property the previous owner, Bill Wingate, would almost certainly have been mentioned in the article.

The email continued:

"But most interesting, our neighbor, according to her husband, Kevin Sarnwick, went on a tour to the Council Rock with Bill Wingate a couple decades ago. Her name is Marilyn Sarnwick. She claims it is in the Covered Bridge Subdivision...Kevin S. says that Jim Heisler just chatted with him about this same question a week or so ago. So, Kevin may have already passed this information along to Jim."

Thanks to the help and assistance of many good-hearted people, we now felt we were closing in on Council Rock.

A Rock-Solid Story

The fact that Marilyn Sarnwick had gone on a walk to Council Rock with Bill Wingate, according to the email from Nancy and Randy Schietzelt, was big news for a couple of reasons. First, it confirmed something that we suspected and hoped for, that Bill Wingate was familiar with Council Rock. Second, the Wingate-Sarnwick walk to the rock had to have occurred between 1984, when the Sarnwicks moved into their home on Walkup Road, and 1995 when Bill passed away. That meant the walk took place after the Covered Bridge Trails subdivision had been completed.

We did keep our appointment at Shamrock Hills and spent a good part of a morning looking through the collection of Bill Wingate's notes on flora and fauna, some of which dealt in depth with Wingate Prairie and Sterne's Woods. If a person did not know Mr. Wingate, one could certainly tell from this part of his collection that he was not only an avid naturalist and conservationist, but also a dedicated teacher. Unfortunately, we did not find anything referring to Council Rock or local Native Americans among his papers.

Over lunch Jim and I discussed our next step: contacting Marilyn Sarnwick. Jim noticed he had left his Council Rock research papers at Shamrock Hills, so we needed to return there. On our way back, we saw a woman mowing the roadside lawn at the Sarnwick home: Marilyn, perhaps?

After retrieving Jim's papers, we headed to the Sarnwicks and pulled into their driveway. We approached Marilyn who was picking up black walnuts which had fallen from their trees. She confirmed that she and Bill Wingate had taken a walk to the rock. She also told us that Mr. Wingate, himself, referred to the rock as "Council Rock."Marilyn was the first person we had met who had seen Council Rock after the development of the subdivision and, better yet, knew exactly where it was!

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The only thing left to do was to receive permission to go on the property and see Council Rock for ourselves.

A Meeting at Council Rock

There was no full moon; we walked there in daylight. The deep woods now were tamed by curbed streets and fine homes. Yet, north of Hillside Road – more than 50 years after Harold Freese had given a *Crystal Lake Herald* reporter a tour and more than 150 years after Native American chiefs gathered at this exact spot – here rested Council Rock.

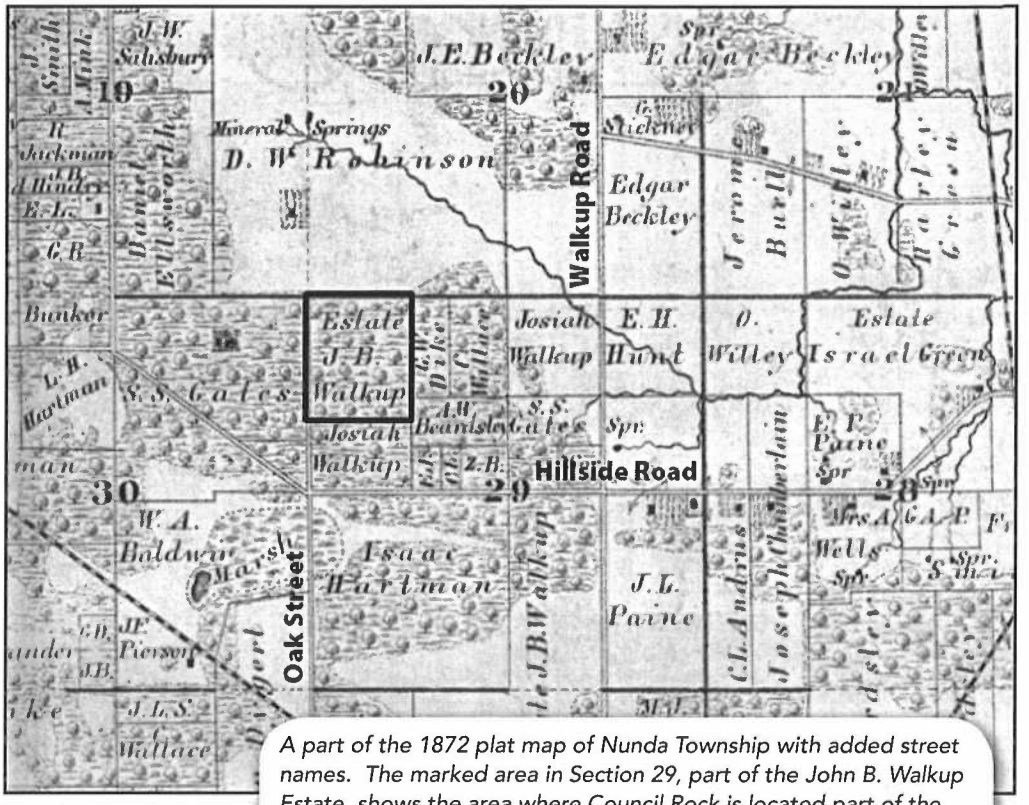
It did not disappoint. Council Rock, if one can call it a rock, is *bigger* than a car. Harold Freese was accurate: like an iceberg, more rock lay buried below "see-level" than was on display. It certainly was not movable.

Council Rock stood before us, firm, resolute, stubborn like Truth – here to be discovered if one was interested enough to investigate.

Now that we stood at the rock, we had a clearer vision looking into the past. The clues we were given along the way fell more easily into place, like putting in the final pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The route to the rock could easily have been Oak Street with a return past Veteran Acres on Walkup. Oak trees and cottonwoods still provided shade for the rock. We also found an old spring 10 yards away from the rock, maybe closer.

This huge rock sat at the corner of four lots as Lorrin Woodman had told Harold Freese. Lorrin had also said it was on old John Walkup's estate, and that was true, too – a clue we had largely ignored.

Humbly standing at this moss-covered rock that was here ages before us and will remain ages beyond, one can imagine Native American chiefs sitting upon or leaning against this limestone outcropping considering the best ways to deal with the issues of the day.



A part of the 1872 plat map of Nunda Township with added street names. The marked area in Section 29, part of the John B. Walkup Estate, shows the area where Council Rock is located part of the Covered Bridge Trails subdivision today.

Note: *The title of the 1969 Crystal Lake Herald article contains an error. A new moon gives off very little light, as only a tiny sliver of the moon can be seen reflecting the sun. Within the article itself, Harold Freese had told the reporter that "Mr. Rose told me about Council Rock. He said the tribal chiefs met there every full moon."*

That would be more accurate and should have been the headline. ◆

Council Rock in October 2019. Its visible measurements are roughly 19'6"x 7'x 3'3".
Photo by K. Pearson.

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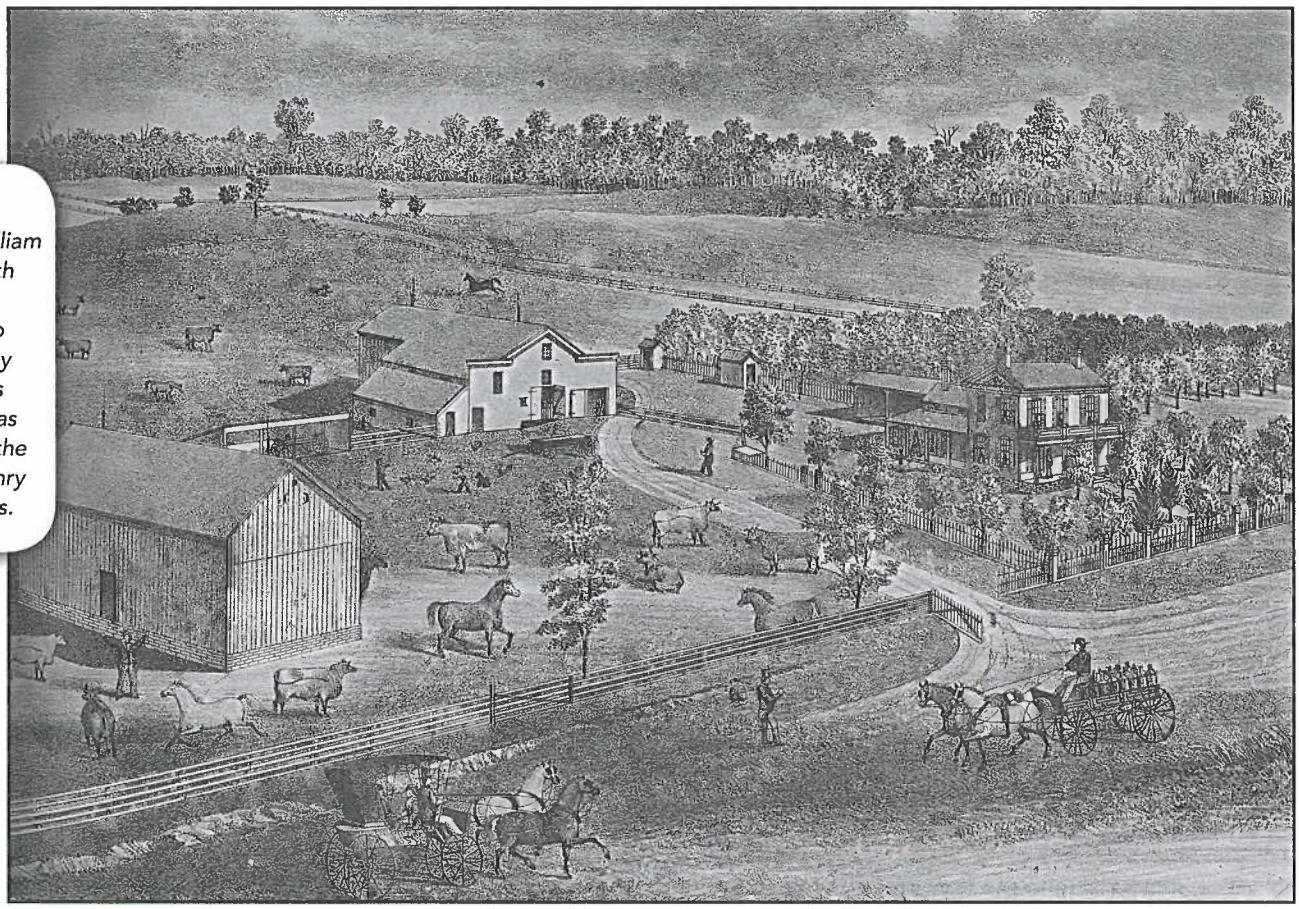

The former home of William and Elizabeth McConnell was given to son, John, by the time this depiction was included in the 1872 McHenry County Atlas.

Hampshire, which itself was first called Munterloney after Muinter Luinigh in Ireland near Ulster. William McConnell would live on this high ground on what is today Broadway Road for the rest of his life. He eventually bought more than 1,400 acres – including oak savannahs, wetlands and prairie.

A third son, George, was born on March 3, 1845, to William and Elizabeth – one year after Lake County split off from McHenry County. After some consternation, the county seat moved from McHenry to geographic heart of what remained: Centerville, now called Woodstock.

McConnell and his family lived in a log cabin for 15 years, before building a Greek Revival house in 1852 with five bedrooms, a parlor, office, a large kitchen and two porches on a fieldstone foundation. Indoor plumbing did not exist inside until the 1950s. "McConnell lost his father when he was 10. I suspect he learned a lot on his feet and relied on his training as a carpenter," Wilson said. "We know he built his own house and stable."

The house is now owned by Lopat and her husband, John Drummond. It serves as the book's touchstone to the past.

"It was always a cherished idea for me to research and write a book about our house," Lopat said. "But I didn't know how to accomplish it, particularly a book that was illustrated."

The path to the book's completion arrived by chance at a Lake Forest library program, where Wilson was assisting at a genealogy workshop. She had her own recently written book, Our Slovak Ancestors, with her. The book was loaded with photos and full-color images.

"What luck!" Lopat said. "Her book looked like a great template for mine. Michelle was between clients and I was in the enviable position of being able to work with her. It turned out to be an excellent partnership."

Wilson credits Lopat's penchant for research during the roughly 18-month process with answering the many questions they were investigating.

"Rommy was so persistent," Wilson said. "I can't tell you how many people we talked to and interviewed. People were so willing to lend their expertise and knowledge. I was amazed at how were able to piece it all together with the information we found."

In 1844, voters elected McConnell to the three-member McHenry County Commissioner's Court, a predecessor of the McHenry County Board. In addition to general supervision duties throughout the county, the panel established election precincts and the tax rate, issue licenses, and ordered roads. At its first meeting, it established eight road districts. No surprise, Richmond benefited from two state line routes. McConnell also was among those appointed to "lay out a road from Woodstock to Nunda."

It is now known as McConnell Road.

McConnell was the county's first justice of the peace. He served 16 years as an associate judge for the county. He served as postmaster in 1838 and as delegate that June to Illinois Democratic Convention in Vandalia. He was an election judge and a member of the Illinois Board of [Tax] Equalization.

The town's first schoolhouse, a log cabin, was located on McConnell's property, probably within what is today's Richmond Cemetery. He was instrumental in forming and

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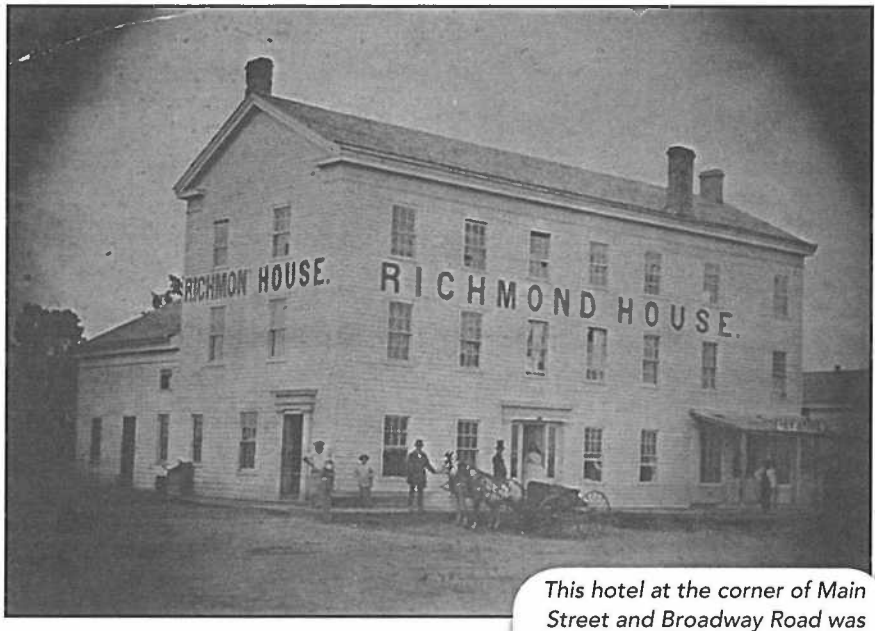
supporting Richmond's Methodist Episcopal Church, and McConnell was a member of the county's first temperance organization – the Washingtonians.

"He was conservative and independent, religious, frugal, and a teetotaler," Lopat said. "He was definitely true to his Scotch-Irish roots."

In 1854 he was appointed township representative to the Board of County Supervisors and its chairman. He rejoined the board in 1867 and served for 15 years – 13 of those as chairman. In the 1870s, McConnell was elected to a two-year term as a state representative from the 93rd district.

"What was it about him that allowed William McConnell to emerge as a leader?" Wilson asked. "Somehow he rose to great heights from the county level. He was well connected and knew people of influence."

He also was quite the entrepreneur. Despite reports that milk produced in the county "was inferior for cheese, because the grass, soil and climate were not suitable" McConnell partnered with Dr. Reuben R. Stone to launch the Richmond Cheese Factory. This was the first attempt in the county to make cheese on a large scale. The factory's first batch came on the heels of the Civil War, in May 1866, and rivaled quantities of that produced by Gail Borden in Elgin. In addition to 185,000 pounds of cheese that year, the factory also produced butter. McConnell later turned over the factory to his son, John, taking on William Wallace Seyton as a partner. In 1883, John sold his interest in the plant. It remained in operation until it burned down in 1899.



This hotel at the corner of Main Street and Broadway Road was destroyed by fire in 1902 and replaced by Kruse Hardware.

William McConnell invested in Foreman's Wood Preserver, a treatment for fence posts. Also, as the "county squire," he

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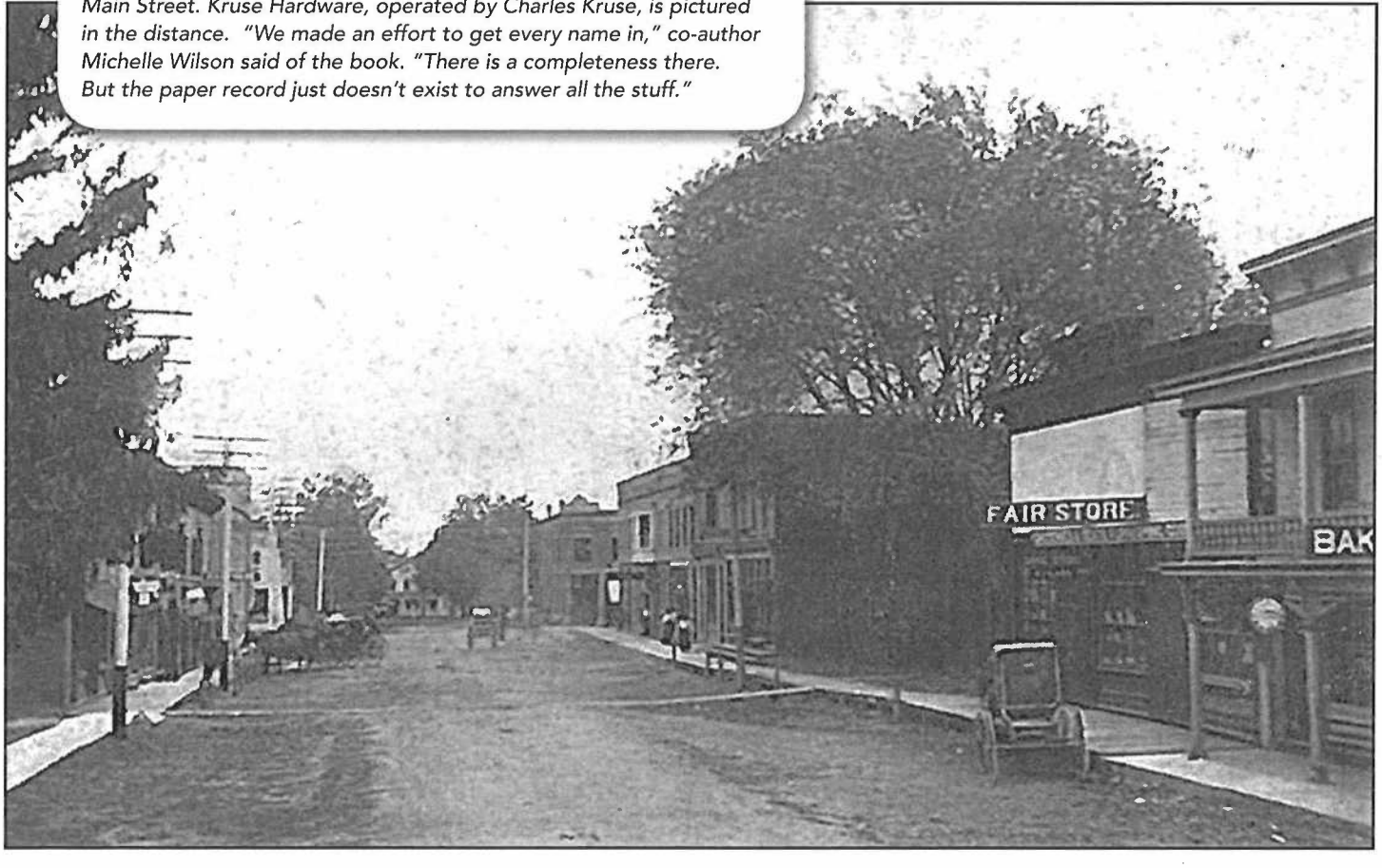

This picture looks east, from the bridge, down Broadway Road toward Main Street. Kruse Hardware, operated by Charles Kruse, is pictured in the distance. "We made an effort to get every name in," co-author Michelle Wilson said of the book. "There is a completeness there. But the paper record just doesn't exist to answer all the stuff."

Continued from page 9

In 1890, John and George McConnell opened the Bank of Richmond – formalizing a lending relationship with the community which began with their father, William. Civic engagement was a hallmark of the McConnell family – both during life and upon death. John's son, Charles DeWitt McConnell, died of appendicitis at age 28. Among the beneficiaries was the village of Richmond. Charles left $10,000 for construction of a village hall. Memorial Hall, which remains standing, opened in 1906.

lent considerable sums of money to local businessmen at a time when bartering – rather than banking – was common practice. "The United States had no unified monetary system for a good part of 19th century," Lopat said. The authors found nearly 160 mortgages held by McConnell in the McHenry County Recorder's office records. The very last loan was made on Oct. 4, 1887, just nine days before McConnell's death. "This was to Samuel B. and Mary Reed, for the southwest quarter of Section 19 in Greenwood Township," Wilson and Lopat wrote.

It probably should come as no surprise that McConnell's sons, John and George, opened the Bank of Richmond in 1890. They spent $5,000 to build it at 5611 Broadway Road. John McConnell also partnered with neighbor George W. Eldredge in the Richmond Pickle Factory. He and his brother, George, helped fund construction of what is now the United Church of Christ – Community Church of Richmond. John's son, Charles DeWitt McConnell, donated $5,000 to the church and $10,000 for a village hall upon his untimely death at the age of 28 in 1903. Memorial Hall opened in 1906.

The McConnell family and Richmond will be forever entwined. Montelona Farm is a tribute to that legacy. ◆

• *Montelona Farm: The Story of Pioneer William A. McConnell's Homestead in Richmond,* Illinois is available for purchase at the McHenry County Museum in Union or online at https://www.lulu.com/spotlight/montelonafarm. The authors may be reached at weedpatch@gmail.com (Rommy Lopat), and michellebwilson@comcast.net (Michelle Bray Wilson).

DeFiore
FUNERAL & CREMATION SERVICE

Continued on page 13

Newcomer brings artistic flair to science of museum management

We received resumes from around the country for our open Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator position. But as fate would have it, the McHenry County Historical Society settled on a gal who lived "just down the street."

Polish immigrant Karolina Kowalczyk joined our administrative team late last year – just in time for a global pandemic! But rather than fret about it, she has channeled her creative energy into trying to devise new approaches toward connecting with the historical society's volunteers, members and supporters. Building on her experiences working with volunteers and students at the Art Institute of Chicago, she has launched a monthly newsletter for volunteers and worked with the board's Education Committee to develop take-home learning kits for children sequestered at home.

Needless to say, it has been quite a learning experience for all of us!

A practicing mixed-media artist, specializing in the Polish paper-cutting technique called "wycinanki," Karolina provides a little insight on what drives her within her artist statement on www.karolinaart.com:

"... Over the next year, my family will be the focus of my work. My aim is to serve as the family record-keeper, to translate and interpret our memories and experiences into tangible, visual pieces. Through interviews, I want to create a space for them to honestly reflect on being an immigrant Polish family, loss of language and traditions, as well as their interwoven, and occasionally turbulent relationships. This is an attempt to connect myself to my roots out of fear that the older generation will be gone without capturing who they had been and how that had shaped me."

- Kurt Begalka

TRACER: What is your role with the McHenry County Historical Society?
KOWALCZYK: I took on the role of Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, which means I work on membership, education and volunteers. I enjoy the nice mix of projects and responsibilities that come along with these three categories.

TRACER: How long have you been here?
KOWALCZYK: My first day was Valentine's Day 2020.

TRACER: What prompted you to choose this organization?
KOWALCZYK: Being very new to the area I wanted to find a

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NAME: Karolina Kowalczyk
AGE: 33
TOWN WHERE I LIVE NOW: Marengo
HOMETOWN: Raba Wyzna, Poland (southern end of Poland about 90 minutes south of Krakow)
FAMILY (parents/siblings): I have my parents (Peter and Grace), older sister (Kathy), a niece and a very large extended family - half of which are in the Chicago area and other half in Poland (including my 95-year-old grandma).
EDUCATION: Bachelor of Fine Arts from the American Academy of Art in Chicago
FAVORITE MOVIE: I don't have a favorite but am a big fan of scary movies.
LAST CD BOUGHT: CDs!? Last iTunes download – *Rock the Casbah* by The Clash
MY GUILTY PLEASURE IS: Potato chips and Netflix
KETCHUP OR MUSTARD ON A HOT DOG: Ketchup
MY FAVORITE ETHNIC FOOD: Polish and Indian dishes
FUNNY/INTERESTING THING PEOPLE TYPICALLY DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME: I grow and sell organic vegetables and am a proud cat lady at heart. (Cats' names are Peas and Carrots.)

Continued from page 11

way to positively contribute and be a part of my community. After finding the open position posting and researching the MCHS my jaw dropped and I knew this was meant to be, given my background in museums, education and general interests

TRACER: Why history? What is it about this career that trips your trigger?
KOWALCZYK: For me it's individual's stories that get me. I love that we can capture stories and retell them to different generations while using them as a tool for education and entertainment.

TRACER: What is the best part of working at the museum?
KOWALCZYK: The people that I have met so far. Everyone has been kind, supportive, and helpful and I am very grateful for that.

TRACER: What are your long-term goals?
KOWALCZYK: As you can imagine my answer would have been a bit different before the pandemic. Now, as we will work to get life back to a new normal. My goals focus on learning how to keep members, volunteers and museum visitors safe and engaged with MCHS. So much has changed in ways that we don't know yet but being creative, curious and flexible will let us thrive long term

TRACER: How did you get to where you are today?
KOWALCZYK: Throughout my life I've been surrounded by wonderful individuals that supported me and kept me accountable at every turn. My career has been varied (advertising, museum, youth programming), challenging, and fun. After I listened to my heart the start of a new path unfolded in front of me and here we are!

TRACER: Do you have a mentor? If so, who, and describe how he/she influenced you.
KOWALCZYK: I had many unofficial mentors over the years and I'll mention my dear friend Mark who has passed. Mark would tell me "Keep it cute or keep it on mute!" anytime he sensed that a then 23-year-old me was on the verge of a work meltdown. While it always made me laugh, it also taught me to pause, to not be reactive and to listen to others while keeping my bias in check. It is hard and I work on this every day and hope I make him proud.

TRACER: Do you have a favorite memory of a great day at the Historical Society?
KOWALCZYK: All days that I have been in the office have been great so far! I miss working with the team face to face and seeing our volunteers and members. I can't wait to get back in the office and make some new memories. ◆

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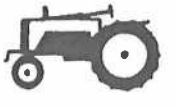

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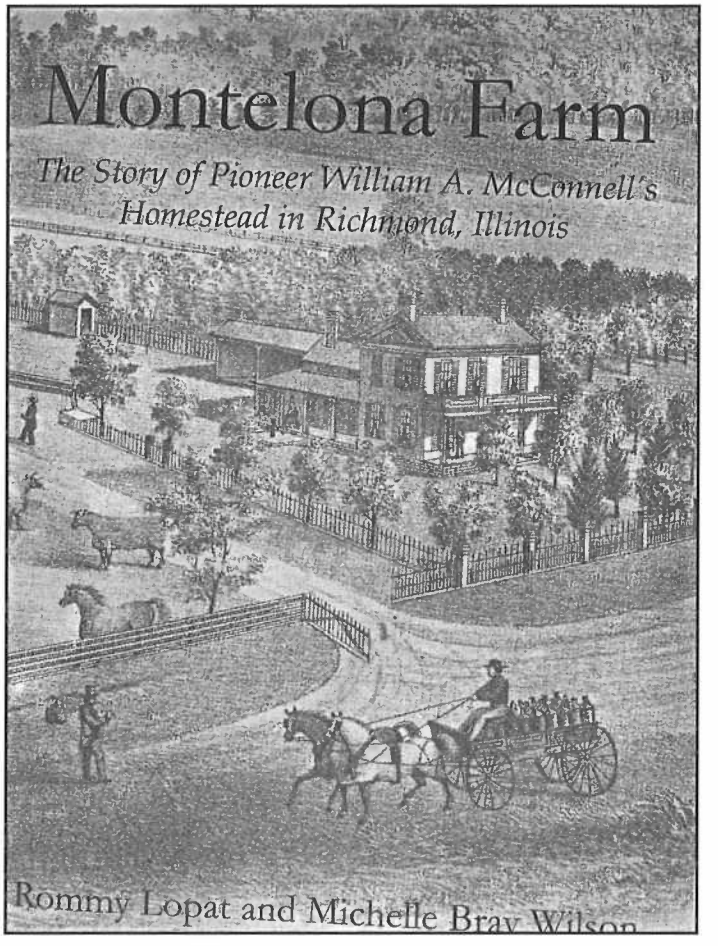
Montelona Farm by Rommy Lopat and Michelle Bray Wilson

Self-published at Lulu.com 2018

By CRAIG L. PFANNKUCHE

"It's a nice microcosm of how things developed during that settlement period," co-author Rommy Lopat said of Montelona Farm. "I would encourage others to do this kind of thing – whether it is a house, like we did, or not. It puts people in the context of their time. That is what the McHenry County Historical Society is all about."


Montelona Farm
The Story of Pioneer William A. McConnell's Homestead in Richmond, Illinois
Rommy Lopat and Michelle Bray Wilson

This superbly formatted and illustrated history of Richmond's McConnell family and their homestead, is a magnificent example of how local history research should be presented to the public.

The historical and genealogical materials, and the accompanying photographs, present the history of the William McConnell family and its ancestral roots – as well as the region in general – with great clarity. It is an extremely valuable addition to any collection of published histories of McHenry County.

While one might wonder why such a work of limited area interest is of such importance to American history, the answer to that question lies in what is being taught today in secondary schools across the country. As a 30-year instructor of American history in high school, I've become distraught over the increasing emphasis on rote learning of general facts in the classroom. While this may bode well regarding scores on national standardized tests, it does little to excite students.

I was once told by my principal not to discuss local history in relation to national events "because none of that has to do with any of the questions found on the national tests we have to do well on!"

One truism is that we learn from the known to the unknown. That being said, the teaching of American history ought to start from the local area where students live. However, many teachers are not trained on how to integrate local history information into the curriculum. This is compounded by the fact that many have too little historical knowledge of the communities where they are teaching to incorporate such in their lesson plans.

"We had the luxury of following some of the bright, shiny objects – just jewels at the Civil War or John McConnell's trip on the Panama Railway. We were able to touch on things that were peripheral," Rommy Lopat said, "as well as move over time. We talk about the development of trails and roads, as well as show pictures of a town as a bustling little village, streets running through like dirt tracks."

Stringently assigned curriculums, based on vaguely generalized textbooks, also limit the time available to discuss local history in the classroom.

The book *Montelona Farm* is a classic example of one solution to the problem of insufficient resources. It would be a great service to good teaching if many more such local histories in the style of this narrative could be written. *Montelona Farm* and similar books should be made available to every beginning American history instructor all across the nation.

I would love to see a copy in every McHenry County school library (there is a copy in the MCHS Reference Library at the museum) and on the shelves of all those interested in the county's history. ◆

Still making the past present, albeit through a mask

One of America's foremost humorists, Mark Twain, captured the sentiments of many when he noted: "I'm in favor of progress; it's change I don't like."

Nevertheless, here we are. Last year at this time we were oblivious to what was waiting. The coronavirus, literally, was under wraps. A lot has changed since then

After shutting the museum down for 3 ½ months, per state and federal stay-at-home and social-distancing directives, we are just now getting the place up and running again. Major events – including three-quarters of the Sampler Lecture Series, a bus trip, the museum opening, a Memorial Day veterans' program and most recently, Heritage Fair – have been postponed or cancelled.

Yet, through it all, the staff and board have remained plugged in … often by computer from home. Like many nonprofits, your historical society may have taken on a little water but it remains afloat and paddling toward normalcy … or as close as one can expect in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. We just may have to do things a little differently for a while.

~ Kurt Begalka, Administrator

MUSEUM VISITS

The museum opened to members on June 30 and will reopen to the general public soon. As you no doubt guessed, COVID-19 has dictated changes in how we do business. Per Restore Illinois guidelines, timed tickets and online pre-registration for museum visits and special events will be required moving forward. Those ticket links will be shared on our website and on Facebook, visit GotHistory.org regularly or follow us on social media.

Festivals

The Heritage Fair Car Show and Antique Auction have been postponed until Cider Fest – Sunday, Oct. 4. Much of the rest of what was to be the 34th annual festival became a COVID casualty.

But not everything!

The White Elephant and Garden Glitz expanded three days, with the help of local nurseries. They included Countryside Flower Shop, Nursery and Garden Center, the Gardens of Woodstock, Kolze's Corner Gardens, Hubb's Greenhouse, Hoffie Nursery, Tom's Market and Red Buffalo Nursery.

We also are planning some type of Members' Night thank you get-together this summer at the museum … socially distanced but united by our love of local history. More information will be forthcoming, once we get all of the logistics ironed out. Thank you for your support during this health crisis and remember to share your coronavirus experiences using the fillable questionnaire at GotHistory.org.

Paying Homage to Pioneers

Speaking of garden, special thanks to our dedicated group of **Master Gardeners** who once created a thriving Pioneer Garden in front of the museum's 1843 Gannon log cabin. Early Illinoisans, largely of European descent, brought with them the gardening practices of their homelands. A cabin garden, or kitchen garden was what sustained the family year-round. See what vegetables and herbs you can identify in our garden and get ideas for your own kitchen garden.

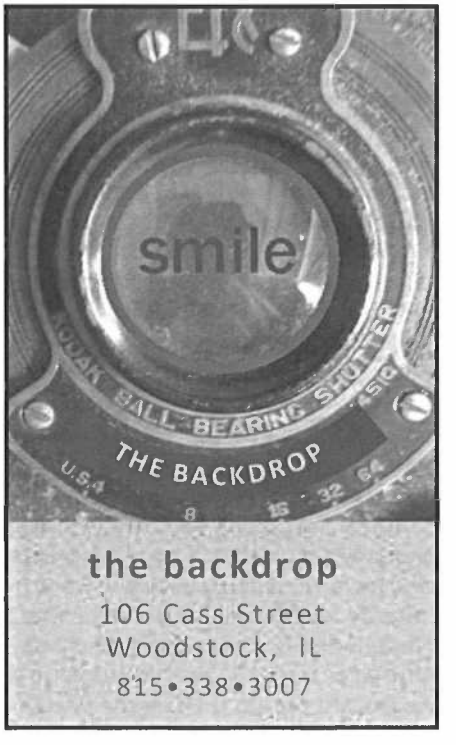
We are excited to welcome **Summer Education Intern Katura Hagerman** of Lake in the Hills. Katura is a student at McHenry County College and will be using her talents to develop new take home activity kits for children as her summer project. The free Pioneer Activity Kit developed by Education Committee Chairwoman Karen Parks and Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator Karolina Kowalczyk has been a huge hit.

Programs

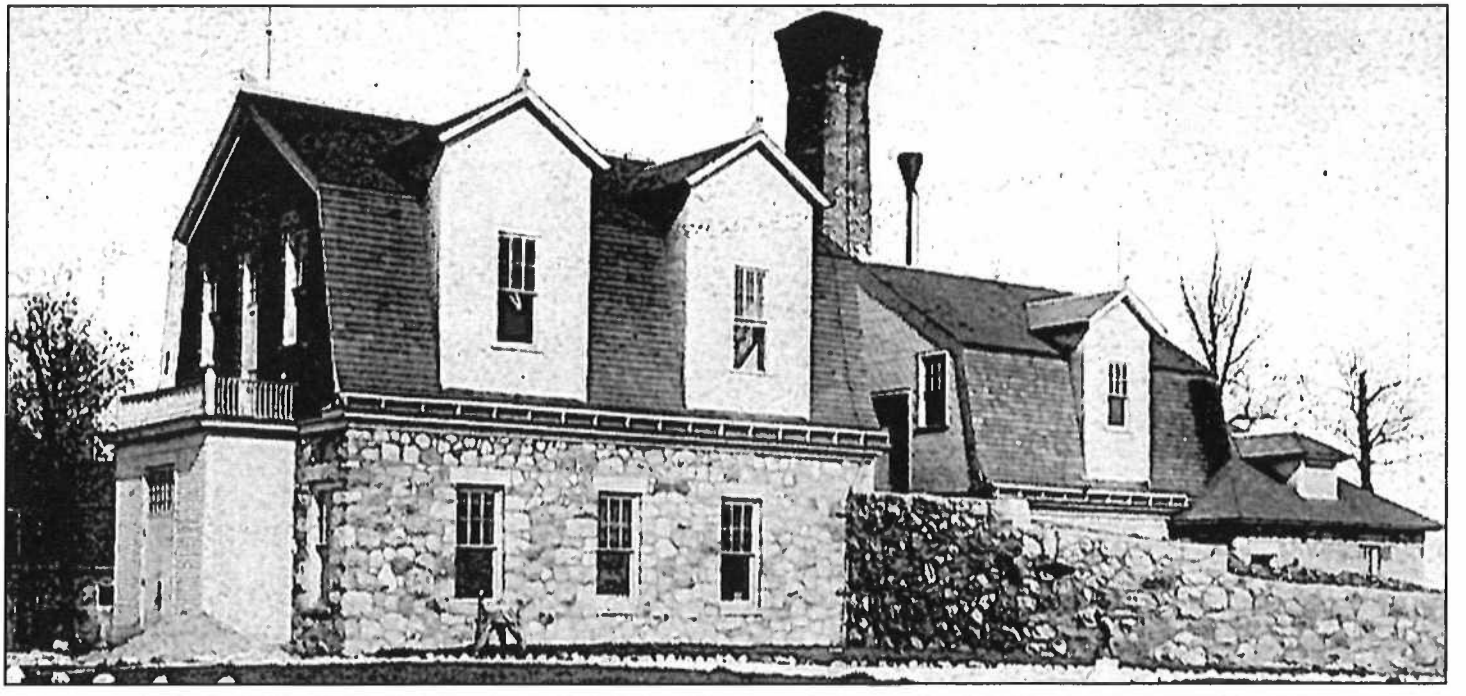
Just because you can attend a program online via a computer, doesn't necessarily mean everyone wants to. Like many, I'm getting "Zoomed" out!

With that in mind, MCHS is working to develop a hybrid approach that will begin with our annual meeting at 6 p.m. Friday, July 24. Timed tickets will allow for a finite number of Society members to view – in person – Bob Frenz's program, commemorating the 150th anniversary of Union School (museum).

Registration begins July 13. For those of you unable to attend, a link will be provided to the recorded lecture and PowerPoint.



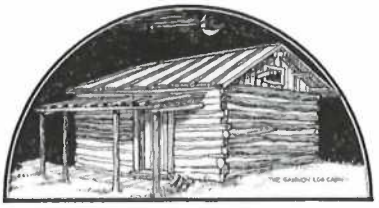
Winter Mystery Photo



Congress Dairy in 1912 – Kimberly Mace knew that the last Mystery Photo was the A.J. Olson Creamery, which later became Congress Dairy. It was among several dairies owned by Illinois State Sen. Albert J. Olson. "His home was located on today's Route 120/McHenry Avenue," Mace wrote, "just west of Broadway Road and west of Marian Central Catholic High School in Woodstock." Olson, who relocated from Chicago, first served on the city council there before holding a variety of public offices in McHenry County that included alderman, mayor and state senator. He championed legislation that allowed dairy farmers to be reimbursed for the destruction of their herds during the tuberculosis scare of the early 1900s. The June 1, 1911, issue of "The Prairie Farmer" praised Olson, who chaired the committee on livestock and dairying, for being a "friend of the dairy farmer. "Tuberculin testing, as it is practice under these state laws, is a farce and killing thousands of healthy cows without benefit to anybody except the man who gets the coin," wrote E.J. Fellow, president of the Milk Producers Association. "Long live Senator Olson." Olson died Oct. 20, 1916. He was just 51 years old.

Spring Mystery Photo

Quite the yard, eh? This renown estate sat on the shores of what lake? For extra credit, can you name the estate?



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Quarterly Newsletter of the McHenry County Historical Society

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MUSEUM VISITS

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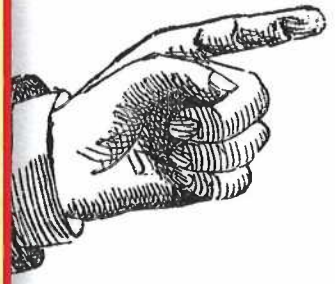

What is required for museum visit?

Check for fever, cough and shortness of breath. Please stay home if you have one or more of these symptoms.

- Wear a cloth face covering (they will be on sale at the front desk if you forget)
- Sanitize your hands upon entry to the museum
- Maintain social distance of 6 feet
- Avoid touching the displays

We are requiring pre-registration/ticket purchase for our visitors.
The visits are limited to one hour and capacity within the museum is limited to 10 visitors.
All visitors are required to maintain social distance, wear face masks and sanitize their hands upon entry into the museum. Museum staff will sanitize high-touch areas and bathrooms at the end of each museum shift.